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An Archaeological Survey of the New Braunfels Little League Project, Comal County, Texas

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**An Archaeological Survey of the New
Braunfels Little League Project,
Comal County, Texas**

John W. Arnn, III

**Robert J. Hard and C. Britt Bousman
Principal Investigators**

Texas Antiquities Permit No. 1791

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Abstract

In February 1997, the Center for Archaeological Research of The University of Texas at San Antonio was contracted by the city of New Braunfels to conduct an archaeological investigation of an area to be impacted by the proposed construction of Little League baseball fields. CAR staff conducted a pedestrian survey of the project area along the Dry Comal Creek and monitored backhoe trenching operations. Two sites were recorded and assigned trinomials: Site 41CM220 lies on an active floodplain and probably represents an open prehistoric campsite with a Late Paleoindian period component. The site is in a previously disturbed setting and no additional investigations are recommended. Site 41CM219 lies on the adjacent hillside and has dense concentrations of historic and prehistoric artifacts. There is a historic stone wall bounding one side of the site, and one course of dressed field stones arranged in a rectangle reminiscent of a small family cemetery plot is located in another part of the site. The historic artifacts are consistent with ceramics associated with the early European—primarily German—settlement of the area. 41CM219 is outside the planned impact area. CAR recommends that any future impacts to the site be preceded by archival research and archaeological testing to determine the site's significance.

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Introduction

In February 1997, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) of The University of Texas at San Antonio was contracted by the city of New Braunfels to conduct an archaeological survey of the area to be impacted by the proposed construction of eight Little League baseball fields, a concession stand, and restrooms. The project area is located approximately 1.5 km west of the town center on the outskirts of New Braunfels, Comal County, Texas (Figure 1). The planned construction will impact approximately 16 acres of the 43 acre plot of land owned by the city of New Braunfels. These impacts will include primarily above ground and shallow disturbances to create eight baseball fields. The limited subsurface impacts will

include the installation of light poles and underground utilities to service the concession stand and restrooms. The maximum depth of these impacts will be approximately two meters, except in the case of a sewer line connection near Loop 337 which will be approximately 3.5 m deep. The exact location of the impacts and the final architectural plans for the project were not known at the time the archaeological survey was conducted.

The project area was first titled by Juan de Veramendi in November 1831 (Fey 1994:236). It remained in the Veramendi family until March 1845 when Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, the first Commissioner-General of the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas, purchased the property for colonization

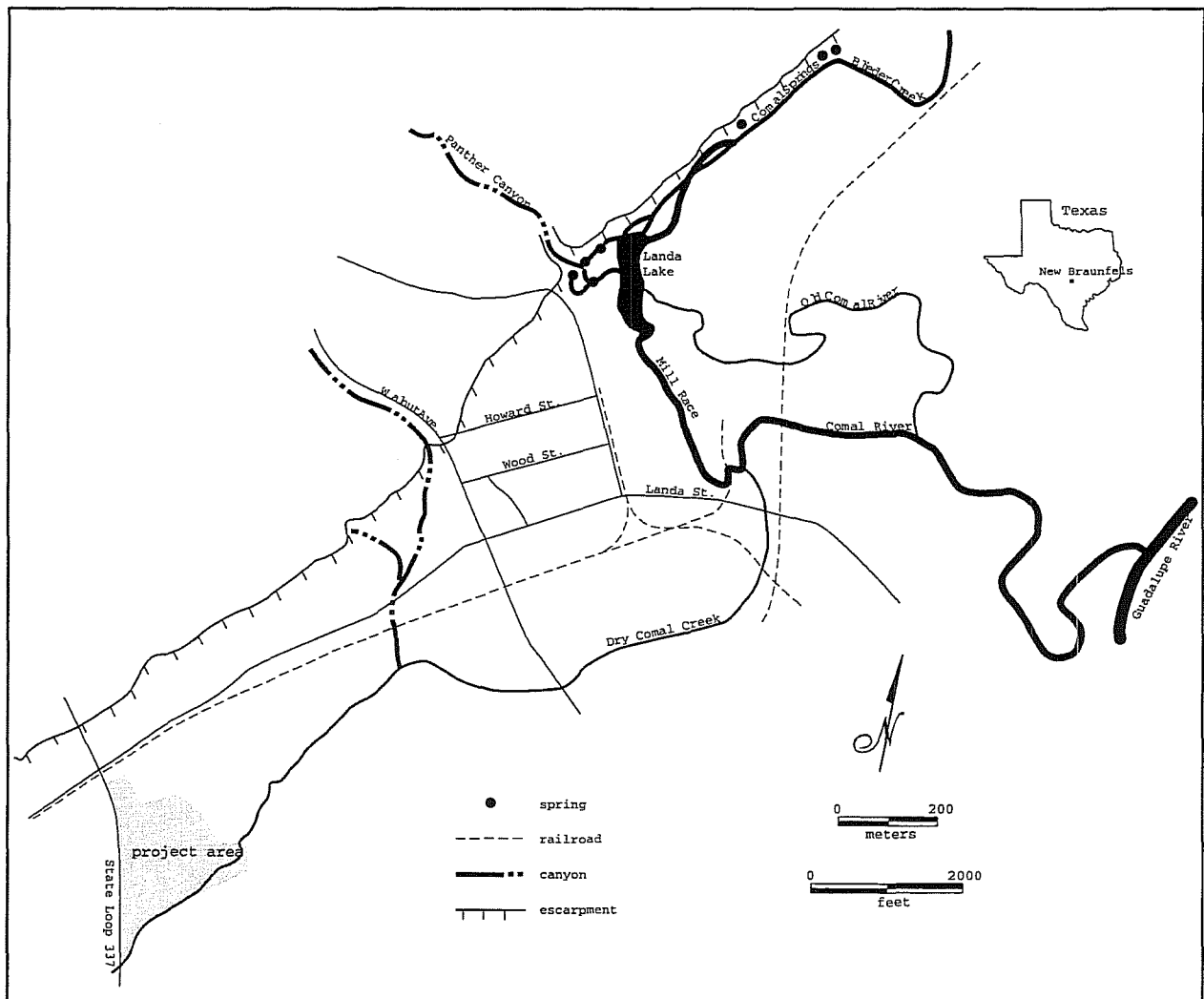


Figure 1. Project location map.

(Haas 1968: 22). John O. Meusebach was granted the property by the German Emigration Company in July 1847 (Comal County Deed Records Vol. A 194–195). From Meusebach, the property passed through a number of hands until it was acquired by the city of New Braunfels in 1995. According to local informants, the project area has been a hay field for at least the last 20 years.

The archaeological survey was conducted by the author and Kimberly Kvernes. Robert J. Hard was the principal investigator, and C. Britt Bousman was the co-principal investigator. Because the planned construction project involves property and funding from the city of New Braunfels, a political subdivision of the state of Texas, an archaeological survey was required under the Texas Antiquities Code (Texas Natural Resources Code, Title 9, Chapter 191). The survey was conducted under Antiquities Permit number 1791 issued by the Texas Historical Commission.

General Setting

The project area is located on the western edge of New Braunfels off the east side of Loop 337 along the Dry Comal Creek. It is bounded on the southeast by the Dry Comal and on the northeast by a tributary of the Dry Comal. It is bounded on the west by Loop 337. The project area can be divided into two distinct geographic areas: an active floodplain zone and an upland zone. The active floodplain is a recently plowed, flat, grass-covered meadow, its edges marked by trees growing along the drainages. The upland area occupies a small hill and, according to flood insurance maps, is out of both the 100- and 500-year flood zones (Flood Insurance Rate Map, 1991, City of New Braunfels, Comal and Guadalupe Counties, Community-Panel Number 485493 0005 D, National Flood Insurance Program, Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA]).

The entire site lies less than 1.5 km from the Comal Springs and less than 500 m from the Balcones Escarpment. The Comal Springs represent an abundant and reliable water source and are characteristic of

several large springs found along the base of the Balcones Escarpment from Waco to Del Rio (Brune 1981:129). The springs are the result of ground water percolating down through the Lower Cretaceous limestones of the Edwards Aquifer and rising along cracks and fissures in the Balcones Fault Zone at the base of the Balcones Escarpment.

The escarpment marks the convergence of the Edwards Plateau to the west and the Blackland Prairie to the east. This area is an ecotone in which a wide variety of plant and animal species which are normally restricted to either the Edwards Plateau or the Blackland Prairie are found (Diamond et al. 1987).

The rich environment described above provided an abundant and varied resource base for both prehistoric and historic peoples. Early historic accounts remark on the numbers of native peoples and the suitability of the area for colonization (Brune 1981:129; Roemer 1935). New Braunfels is one of the earliest German settlements in Texas. However, recent archaeological investigations have determined that this area also has a long and rich prehistoric heritage. Previous archaeological investigations have determined that surface and buried deposits of burned rocks, mussel shell, and lithic artifacts occur with high frequency throughout much of New Braunfels and tend to be concentrated close to springs and along drainages (Arnn 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d; Bailey 1986; Denton 1986, 1987; Espey, Huston, and Associates 1992, 1993; Jackson et al. 1936; Potter 1989; Smith 1985).

Methods

Pedestrian Survey

A pedestrian survey was conducted by two CAR staff members on the active floodplain and the adjacent hill. Prehistoric and historic artifacts were collected. Artifacts were collected according to their geographic location, and artifacts found on the floodplain were kept separate from those found on the hill.

Backhoe Trenches

Although the exact location of the subsurface impacts associated with the planned construction had not been determined at the time the archaeological survey was conducted, four backhoe trenches (BHT) were excavated in areas approximating the location of the concession stand, restrooms, and light poles. Each trench was approximately four meters long and two meters deep. These excavations were monitored, and soil profiles were examined by CAR staff for cultural features or artifacts.

Artifact Classification

All diagnostic artifacts were compared to the typological definitions in Turner and Hester (1993). The temporal assignments of Turner and Hester (1993) were used as well. Nondiagnostic artifacts were classified into the following categories: platform or nonplatform bearing flakes, shatter, cores, unifaces, bifaces, heat-damaged chert (HDC), fire-cracked rock (FCR), and mussel shell (see Whitaker 1994 for a discussion of terms).

Results

Geological Profiles

Two backhoe trench profiles were excavated and described at site 41CM220 (Table 1). BHT 1 exposed 155 cm of alluvial sediments. The upper seven centimeters were disturbed and classified as an Ap horizon. Below this was a truncated B horizon that had formed in fine-grained alluvial deposits. One prehistoric artifact was observed at 35 cm below the surface, but it was tilted vertically and appeared to have fallen down a pedogenic crack. No other artifacts were observed below the surface although a light scatter was present on the surface.

The profile in BHT 2 was very similar, with a disturbed Ap horizon in the upper seven centimeters covering a truncated B horizon below. In the B horizon a burned rock fragment was observed at 20 cm below the surface, but it is unlikely that it was in situ. In both

profiles it appears that the upper surface was eroded and A horizon material transported off site. Rare archaeological materials appear to have fallen down pedogenic cracks and were not in situ.

Survey

The pedestrian survey and subsurface testing confirmed the initial conclusion that the floodplain area had been previously disturbed by years of agriculture use. The plow zone extended to a depth of approximately 50 cm in the four backhoe trenches. The upland part of the property, however, had not been plowed, but it lies outside the proposed impact area.

Essentially the entire floodplain section of the project area was disturbed by recent agricultural use. Along the edges of the creek was a great deal of small to large fire-cracked rock that does not appear to be an in situ feature. It is possible that this is what remains of burned rock features that were removed when the area was cleared for farming. The likelihood of encountering intact cultural features on the floodplain is minimal at best. If any cultural features are indeed present, they are at a greater depth than the proposed impact of the construction project.

Forty artifacts were collected within the project area. Of these, 36 were prehistoric lithic artifacts and four were historic artifacts. Historic artifacts were found only on the upland location, whereas prehistoric artifacts occurred throughout the project area. Two archaeological sites were recorded in the project area: an upland site (41CM219) and an active floodplain site (41CM220) (Figure 2).

Site Descriptions

41CM219

Site 41CM219 encompasses virtually the entire hill and covers approximately 10,000 square meters. It is bounded by Loop 337 on the west, and drainages on the southeast and north sides. Two features are present at the site. A stone wall lies along the south side of the northern drainage, and several stones arranged in a

This page has been redacted because it contains restricted information.

Table 1. Geological Profile Descriptions

Zone	Depth (cm)	Description
Profile 1		
1	0-7	Dark brown (10YR 3/3) loam, loose crumb structure, abrupt smooth lower boundary, Ap horizon.
2	7-50	Dark brown (10YR 3/5) clay loam, moderate crumb structure, clay films on ped faces, common snail shells, few 1-5 cm burrows, few fine faint reddish brown (2.5YR 4/4) mottles, chert flake on edge at 35 cm, gradual smooth lower boundary, B1 horizon.
3	50-95	Dark brown clay loam, medium weak subangular blocky structure, with common medium distinct very dark grayish brown (10YR 3/2) mottles, common fine faint strong brown (7.5YR 4/6) mottles, few small insect-size burrows, common snail shell, few charcoal fragments, few small manganese nodules, gradual smooth lower boundary, B2 horizon.
4	95-155+	Brown (7.5YR 4/4) to strong brown (7.5YR 4/6) clay loam, fine medium subangular blocky structure, clay films on ped faces, few to common small calcium carbonate nodules that increase in frequency down profile, few snail shells, few charcoal fragments, common dark brown (10YR 3/3) insect burrows, lower boundary not observed., B3 horizon
Profile 2		
1	0-7	Dark brown (10YR 3/3) loam, loose, crumb structure, few snail shells, rootlets, very few small pebbles, abrupt smooth lower boundary, Ap horizon.
2	7-17	Dark brown (7.5YR 3/4) clay loam, medium weak crumb structure, clay films on ped faces, common snail shell, rootlets, abrupt smooth lower boundary, B1 horizon.
3	17-65	Dark brown (10YR 3/3) clay loam, friable, weak moderate fine granular structure, clay films on ped faces, common snail shells, rootlets, burned rock at 20 cm, gradual smooth lower boundary, B3 horizon.
4	65-115+	Dark reddish brown (5YR 3/3) firm clay loam, medium moderate subangular blocky structure, clay films on ped faces, rootlets, few snail shells, calcium carbonate filaments, lower boundary not observed, B3 horizon.

rectangle are found on the peak of the hill (Figure 2). The stone wall is stacked and is similar to other historic stone walls found throughout the German Hill Country. The rectangular arrangement of stones is approximately 4.5 m in length, 3 m wide at the west end, and 2.6 m wide on the east end. The feature is oriented north/south, and is composed of one course of dressed stones lying on the surface of the ground. This investigation revealed no historic record of either of these features.

A pedestrian survey of this site produced a total of 21 artifacts. Seventeen of these artifacts were prehistoric

lithic artifacts and included 12 bifaces, four platform flakes, and one nonplatform flake. The historic artifacts included one piece of Oriental porcelain, one sherd of transfer ware, the base of a glass beer mug, and one fragment of blue glass.

41CM220

Site 41CM220 covers approximately 50,000 square meters and is bounded on the west by Loop 337, on the northwest and northeast by small drainages, and

on the southeast by the Dry Comal Creek. No features were observed and all artifacts, with the exception of one flake, were found on the surface. A pedestrian survey of the floodplain site located 19 prehistoric artifacts including 10 bifaces, two cores, five platform flakes, and two nonplatform flakes. One of the bifaces bears a strong resemblance to an Angostura projectile point and suggests a possible Late Paleoindian component. However, the floodplain has been actively farmed for many years and the context of all surface finds is questionable.

The backhoe trench excavations in site 41CM220 produced one nonplatform flake in BHT A. This flake was found within 45 cm of the surface in the plow zone. The observed soil profiles indicated that the site is on an alluvial terrace that has weathered to form a dark-brown A horizon overlying a reddish-brown B horizon. The context in which the flake was found should be considered disturbed.

Summary and Recommendations

The upland site, 41CM219, is distinctive in that it is one of the few locations in the area located well above the floodplain. According to FEMA maps, this hill is above both the 100- and 500-year flood boundaries. Consequently, the hilltop would have made an excellent site for prehistoric camps and later homesteads. The artifacts collected suggest these types of sites. While the archival search did not provide evidence of stone structures or cemeteries and the survey revealed no sign of a house or building, the location, size, and configuration of the stone rectangle suggests a small family cemetery plot. In addition, stacked stone walls are ubiquitous in the German Hill Country and generally denote field and pasture boundaries (Haas 1968:46). In this particular case, the wall lies along the edge of a drainage and might also have been erected to stabilize the hillside. This site is outside the proposed impact area of the little league field construction project. We recommend that any further development of 41CM219 be preceded by additional archival research to determine the property

history and archaeological testing to determine the nature, extent, and significance of the cultural materials present.

Even though a late Paleoindian artifact was recovered from site 41CM220, the disturbance on the floodplain is such that the presence of intact features is unlikely. Therefore, no additional investigations are recommended at 41CM220.

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